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SIPDIS

OFFICIAL INFORMAL

FOR SA/INS

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TAGS: [AMGT](#) [CE](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: OFFICIAL INFORMAL NUMBER 073 (05/18/04)

Classified by DCM James F. Entwistle for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

CONTENTS: MAY 18 PARLIAMENTARY SESSION  
- CUBAN AMBASSADOR'S SPEECH

MAY 18 PARLIAMENTARY SESSION

1. (C) FYI. After almost a month's hiatus, Sri Lanka's Parliament reopened today (May 18). The first order of business was the selection of the new Deputy Speaker of Parliament and Deputy Chairman of Committees. In sharp contrast to the fractious, raucous scenes that attended the election to the Speaker's chair on April 22, the two jobs were filled without opposition. Geethanjana Gunawardena of the UPFA is the new Deputy Speaker and Murugan Satchithanathan of the tea estate Ceylon Worker's Congress (CWC) is the new Deputy Chairman of Committees. (The CWC is in alliance with the UNP.) Contacts have told Mission that this was the result of some sort of deal between the UNP and the UPFA, and that the JVP was reportedly not happy with the compromise. There are also reports that a SLMC MP crossed over to the UPFA right before today's session. (POL)

CUBAN AMBASSADOR'S SPEECH

2. (C) Pls pass to WHA/CCA: FYI. The Cuban Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Enna Viant, gave a press briefing in Colombo attacking the U.S. on May 14. In her scathing remarks, Viant was quoted as stating that a recent report to President Bush by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba was full of "lies, bitterness, frustration, and blatant interference in the internal affairs of another country." Viant then attacked the various chapters of the report, stating: "The cruelty and hatred which inspire this new aggression against our country are beyond belief...It is a flagrant violation of the human rights of the 11 million Cubans whom they are trying to bring to their knees..." She then accused the U.S. of trying to overthrow Castro. We spoke to the reporter who wrote a story on the press briefing in a local newspaper and he said Viant was pretty heated during the news conference (which, in any case, did not receive much press coverage). Just wanted to flag this, as the Cuban Embassy here is usually relatively somnolent. (POL)

LUNSTEAD